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Response by official statistics to the Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable Development Goals, targets and indicators and the Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations on measuring sustainable development

Note by the UNECE Secretariat

Summary

The paper presents summary results of mapping the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), targets and indicators to the indicator framework of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) *Recommendations for measuring sustainable development*. The paper also gives an overview of the pilot testing of the Recommendations in eight countries. Use of a conceptual framework can provide a coherent structure to measuring the SDGs and targets, identify interlinkages, overlaps and gaps, and facilitate the selection of indicators. The mapping also shows how the CES framework should be adjusted to provide basis for a comprehensive framework to measure SDGs.

The paper is presented for discussion to the first session of the Conference of European Statisticians' seminar "Response by official statistics to the Sustainable Development Goals".

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I. Introduction

1. The Conference of European Statisticians (CES) *Recommendations for measuring sustainable development*[1] were developed during 2009-2013 by a joint Task Force of UNECE, the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and a number of countries (chaired by the Netherlands). The work followed up on the outcome of an earlier UNECE/OECD/Eurostat Working Group on the same topic in 2006-2009. **More than 60 countries from the UNECE region and beyond (including OECD member countries) and the major international organizations endorsed the CES Recommendations in June 2013** which were published in the beginning of 2014. A Russian version will be printed shortly.

2. At the time when the CES Recommendations were developed, the idea of establishing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) had not yet been expressed and the global political discussions about what these goals and targets would comprise had not yet taken place. The CES Recommendations aimed at defining the concept of sustainable development and developing a framework for its measurement based on the best knowledge available at the time. Therefore, when the Conference endorsed the Recommendations in 2013, it also decided that the measurement framework needs to be adjusted to the SDGs and targets once these are agreed upon.

3. It is important to note that in its report to the United Nations Statistical Commission[2], the Friends of the Chair (FOC) Group on Broader Measures of Progress stated that: "as a first step the Open Working Group targets should be mapped against each other and analysed with respect to the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) and the CES Recommendations in order to identify interlinkages, overlaps and gaps." (para 13). The FOC Report further suggests to integrate the new SDG indicators into the framework presented in the CES Recommendations (para 35b).

4. Following this request, the UNECE secretariat undertook an initial mapping of the goals and targets developed by the Open Working Group to the indicators and framework presented in the CES Recommendations. The results are preliminary and would need further analysis. However, the mapping exercise provided interesting insights into SDGs and targets, and provided ideas for the architecture of an SDG measurement framework. Furthermore, the analysis shows where the CES framework needs to be adjusted to incorporate the SDG targets.

5. The paper briefly introduces the CES framework and informs about the outcome of the pilot testing of the CES framework in eight countries. Australia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Turkey and Ukraine participated in the pilot testing. The paper presents the main outcomes of the mapping and conclusions that can be drawn from this exercise in view of refining the CES framework in line with the proposed SDGs and targets.

[1] http://www.unece.org/stats/sustainable-development.html
[2] E/CN.3/2015/2

II. CES Recommendations on measuring sustainable development

6. The *CES Recommendations on measuring sustainable development* are a key step towards harmonising the measurement approaches to sustainable development. **The Recommendations provide countries with a universal measurement framework based on synergies between the theoretical concepts and policy needs.** The CES Recommendations show in practice how the countries could present the information on sustainable development in a concise and structured manner. During its development, the measurement frameworks of individual countries were analyzed extensively and the various international initiatives were taken into account, such as the ones by the United Nations, Eurostat and OECD.

7. The sustainable development indicator framework of the CES Recommendations links the theory to policy relevant themes. It aims to base the measurement of sustainable development on solid conceptual grounds while at the same time proposing an indicator set to respond to policy makers' needs in all areas of sustainable development covering its environmental, social and economic aspects.

8. The CES framework draws on three conceptual dimensions of wellbeing as defined in the Brundtland report: wellbeing of the present generation in one particular country (the 'here and now'); wellbeing of future generations ('later') based on the capital approach; and wellbeing of people living in other countries, which incorporates the transboundary impacts of sustainable development ('elsewhere'). These three dimensions are further linked to 20 policy relevant themes, covering environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainable development.

9. The framework can be used in a flexible way. The proposed sustainability themes are universal but there is room for selecting country-specific indicators. The CES Recommendations propose a comprehensive set **of 95 indicators selected on a thematic basis** including more detailed policy relevant indicators according to the 20 policy themes and covering the three dimensions of wellbeing (here and now, later and elsewhere). From these 95 indicators two subsets are defined: (i) **a subset of 60 indicators selected on a conceptual basis** to provide information about the three dimensions of wellbeing, and (ii) **a small set of 24 indicators** to communicate the main messages more efficiently to policymakers and the general public and that could serve for international comparison. An elaborate analysis shows that data for compiling the small set of indicators are available in many existing sustainable development indicator sets and international databases that were reviewed by the Task Force.

III. Outcome of pilot testing of the CES recommendations

10. Following the endorsement of the *CES Recommendations for measuring sustainable development*, eight countries, namely Australia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Turkey and Ukraine pilot tested the recommended framework and indicators in 2014.

11. In the pilot testing exercise, the countries were asked to review the set of 95 indicators, examine the indicator descriptions and see whether these indicators are used in their country. In addition, the countries were invited to match their national indicators to the CES framework and provide feedback on whether the proposed framework had been helpful in reviewing and constructing the national indicator sets. Finally, the countries were requested to identify implementation issues, in particular to analyze possible data gaps,

identify proxy indicators and suggest indicators to fill in "place holders" (indicators that are needed but not yet produced).

12. The pilot testing exercise demonstrated the usefulness of the CES framework, its flexibility and ease of application in practice. The results show that all of the participating countries produce majority of the 95 CES indicators. Australia, Italy and Russian Federation produce more than 77 per cent of the CES indicators. Mexico, Kazakhstan and Slovenia produce two thirds of the CES indicators.

13. Four of the countries (Italy, Mexico, Slovenia and Ukraine) indicated that they used the CES framework in developing their national sustainable development indicators.

14. Furthermore, the pilot testing showed that basic statistics are available to produce the CES indicators for all the policy themes included in the CES framework. One of the challenges will be, therefore, to ensure that the same basic statistics are available in all CES countries so that comparable results could be produced in assessing progress made towards SDGs and targets.

15. The pilot testing exercise was very helpful in identifying gaps in the national measures of sustainable development. It also identified some areas covered by the national sets, which are missing in the CES framework and could be added in the future. Some examples include: transport and communication, ageing, participation in sports and cultural activities, etc.

16. The main conclusions from the pilot testing are presented below:

A. Feasibility to produce some CES indicators that are currently not produced

17. Countries indicated that they have the capacity to produce certain CES indicators which are currently not produced. Furthermore, some indicators with only small differences in the method of calculation could be easily adjusted and produced, for example in cases when age groups are slightly different (employment rates, smoking prevalence, etc.).

B. Expanding national SDI sets to include more CES indicators

18. Several countries shared their plans to introduce the production of certain CES indicators in the near future. This includes, for example, in Russian Federation the indicators on leisure time, healthy life expectancy, natural capital, contacts with family and friends and participation in voluntary work; in Kazakhstan competency of adults and trust in institutions; and in Turkey expenditure on education. Furthermore, Australia explained that one of the most difficult CES indicators – the "human capital" indicator - is being produced in the country on an experimental basis.

C. Suggested indicators to fill in for the "placeholders" in the CES framework

19. The CES measurement framework is forward looking, and as such 22 of the 95 CES indicators were noted as indicators that are not yet produced but would be needed in the future. These were referred to as "placeholders".

20. The majority of "placeholders" in the CES Recommendations come from the area of environment. There are also "placeholders" in the area of housing, social capital, knowledge capital, distributional issues, migration and physical safety.

21. Piloting countries made useful suggestions to fill in the missing indicators, especially in the area of environment, housing and social capital. The countries proposed indicators from their national indicator sets for more than half of the "placeholders". Several suggestions refer to the distributional indicators on health and education.

IV. Mapping of the SDG targets and the CES framework

22. The mapping of the SDG targets and the CES framework was undertaken by the UNECE secretariat. Its main purpose was to analyse how a conceptual framework, such as the CES framework can be used to structure the SDGs, targets and their future indicators. The term 'framework' here is understood as a coherent underlying structure that allows to organize the list of indicators. SDGs and related targets are based on policy priorities agreed through political negotiations. Therefore, the resulting list of goals and targets can easily include inconsistencies, overlaps and gaps.

23. Another aim was to identify how the CES framework can be adjusted to take into account the measurement needs for SDG targets. For example, it may be necessary to improve the definition and extend the coverage of some themes, and add themes that may be missing from the CES framework.

24. The use of a framework is important to:

(a) organise the goals and targets into a coherent structure;

(b) give a broad view of the SDGs, avoiding a narrow viewpoint of a specific sector;

(c) link national, regional and global perspectives;

(d) identify inter-linkages, overlaps, gaps and trade-offs between the goals, targets and respective indicators;

(e) facilitate the selection of indicators, narrow down the list of indicators and balance the indicator system between different aspects (economic, social and environmental);

(f) facilitate communication of the indicators.

25. The mapping was based on the goals and targets proposed by the Open Working Group. The analysis also took into account the different indicator lists that have been circulated for comments: the survey by the Friends of the Chair Group on Broader Measures of Progress, the proposal by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the proposal prepared by UNSD for the discussion at the UN General Assembly negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (23-27 March 2015).

26. Although more analysis needs to be done, some conclusions can be drawn which will help to structure the measurement of the many policy issues that are incorporated in the SDG targets. The analysis can also facilitate the selection of future SDG indicators.

27. The mapping was done in two ways:

(a) Taking the CES Recommendations as a starting point and allocating the indicators to the SDG targets;

(b) Taking the SDG targets as a starting point and allocating them to the CES framework.

28. When taking the **CES framework as the starting point**, the mapping revealed that all CES indicators could be mapped to the respective SDGs and targets.

29. When taking the **SDG targets as a starting point**, the initial analysis shows that a great majority of these targets can be mapped to the CES framework. Some themes and dimensions in the CES framework may need to be extended to take into account all related aspects of the SDG targets, or new themes added.

30. For example, the CES framework includes a theme "Nutrition" as part of human well-being. This theme can be extended to include food, food security and food waste aspects. The CES framework includes a dimension "Transboundary impacts" to measure how countries impact other countries through migration, trade, financial flows, technology transfer, etc. This dimension may be extended to cover also global aspects, such as oceans (Goal 14). "Transport" and "Infrastructure" could be added as a new theme or incorporated under the theme of economic capital.

31. Some of the SDG targets are very wide, encompassing many different areas. For example, target 2.3: "by 2030 double the agricultural productivity and the incomes of small-scale food producers, particularly women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets, and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment" or target 4.7. "by 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development". Such targets are very difficult to match and it will be a challenge to measure these targets by one indicator.

32. It is also challenging to match the targets that concern policies and means of implementation - these are mainly the targets denoted with letters, e.g. 1.b: "create sound policy frameworks, at national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies to support accelerated investments in poverty eradication actions". It has to be decided what kind of indicators to use to measure such targets: whether to focus on the existence of specific policies, or try to measure the outcome of implementing these policies.

33. The mapping of SDGs and targets to the CES framework allowed to identify overlaps in the targets. There are quite many overlaps, especially concerning areas that are addressed under several goals, such as labour, gender, inequality, access to resources, climate change, etc.

34. With regard to cross-cutting issues, there is often a goal focusing on a particular issue, and in addition targets dealing with this issue under other goals. "Gender" is a good example this. Goal 5 of SDGs deals with gender equality. In addition, gender aspects are included in many other SDGs: such as Goal 1 "Poverty" (targets 1.2, 1.4), Goal 2 "Hunger, nutrition and food security" (targets 2.2 and 2.3), Goal 3 "Health" (target 3.1), Goal 4 "Education" (targets 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7), Goal 8 "Economic growth, employment and decent work" (targets 8.5 and 8.8), Goal 10 "Inequality" (targets 10.2 and 10.3), Goal 11 "Cities" (targets 11.2 and 11.7), and Goal 12 "Sustainable consumption and production".

35. "Labour" is another example: Goal 8 "Economic growth, employment and decent work" addresses employment directly. In addition, labour issues are dealt with in Goal 5 "Gender equality" (targets 5.1 and 5.4), and Goal 10 "Reduce inequality" (targets 10.2 and 10.3).

36. An overlap is not a disadvantage in itself. It shows a link between targets and can help to reduce the number of indicators when one indicator can be used to measure several targets.

V. Conclusions

37. The CES Recommendations provide an important contribution to the current process of establishing a measurement framework for SDGs and the related targets. The Recommendations are the result of several years of work by countries and international organizations, and are based on thorough review of data availability and feasibility testing.

38. A major conclusion from the pilot testing by countries and the mapping exercise by the UNECE secretariat is that the framework presented in the CES Recommendations can be used as a starting point for developing a SDG measurement framework:

(a) The CES framework and set of indicators is flexible and can be adapted to country/regional circumstances and policy priorities;

(b) The pilot testing has proved its practical usability for countries;

(c) The CES framework allows to link the goals and targets (policy themes) to conceptual dimensions of sustainable development.

39. The CES framework needs to be adapted to SDGs: the coverage of some of the dimensions can be extended and new themes could be added. Taking into account the limited time, this will be the most efficient and practical way to develop a feasible architecture for measuring SDGs and the related targets.

40. As decided by the United Nations Statistical Commission and being supported by the negotiations of the United Nations General Assembly on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the global indicator set should be kept manageable and contain only a limited number of indicators. This leaves room for the regions and countries to develop their own indicators to complement the global set and take into account the regional and national circumstances and priorities.

41. Therefore, the way forward for the countries in the UNECE region could be to adjust the framework presented in the CES Recommendations and use it as a basis for a regional SDG monitoring system. This would build on the joint work that was done by UNECE, Eurostat, OECD and a number of countries, and endorsed by Conference of European Statisticians. A small expert group could be created by CES to adjust the CES framework in line with SDGs and targets.